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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, DC—Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) said she and thousands of Washingtonians today are “profoundly disappointed” to see Walter Reed leave the nation’s capital but buoyed by the prospect of gaining 3,300 jobs at Bolling. “They can rename a new hospital at Bethesda, ‘Walter Reed,’ but they will never be able to recapture what this landmark hospital has meant for nearly hundred years in the nation’s capital,” Norton said. The Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) this morning accepted the Department of Defense (DoD) proposal to move Walter Reed to Bethesda, and President Bush has said he will accept the BRAC recommendations without change. However, Norton said she believes Walter Reed will be in the District for at least another 10 years. “It was clear from the dialogue today,” Norton said, “that the commissioners were ‘lured by the prospect of a new hospital, and everything else was off the table, even homeland security.’ Norton had offered the alternative of renovating the hospital incrementally on its present site to produce savings and avoid other risks. The District got one important victory today when BRAC named Bolling as a site that should be considered along with Bethesda for consolidation of the Joint Medical Command for the Navy School of Medicine located in the Potomac Annex in D.C., the Air Force Medical Command at Bolling in D.C. and the TRICARE Management Authority and the Army Surgeon General both located in Virginia. In July, Norton argued against co-location in Bethesda citing space and expense factors. She said that instead of Bethesda, these facilities should be co-located at Bolling, where one of the facilities is already located and is the closest facility to the Pentagon. Norton wrote in her brief: “The present employees at Bolling would remain, thus removing disruption, dislocation and potential controversy. Employees now at sites elsewhere in the region would be able to come to Bolling with relative ease, and co-location at Bolling would help to compensate for the already contemplated job losses at the facility.” Norton said that she was optimistic that Bolling can get the 3,300 jobs because these are administrative, not medical jobs and Bethesda will not have ample space. Norton and Mayor Anthony Williams presented the city’s case before the Commission in July, and Norton appeared before the Commission again this month. She submitted two briefs and an additional letter, focusing not only on the technical military value aspects she believed favored the city’s position, but also on the military value of the homeland security mission of the hospital that was also an important part of the BRAC evaluation process. Norton said that homeland security helped save several installations yesterday but apparently was given “short shrift” here. The hospital’s unique role in the District’s homeland security plan, designed for its role as a federal city, “will be lost” not only to residents but also to top federal officials and the other 200,000 employees in the White House, the Congress, and other federal sites because Walter Reed will be 50 percent further from downtown. “Walter Reed has unique capabilities,” she said, “that will be of little use in case of a mass terrorist attack on the nation’s capital.” Norton said, “Of course, I’ve been thinking about the possible BRAC outcome with both sides of my brain because BRAC overwhelmingly has favored the DoD in prior BRAC rounds. While I’ve been trying to keep Walter Reed open, I had to also begin thinking about the alternatives, in case we lost the hospital.” She said, however, that it was far too early for the city to be concerned because of the prospects of getting funds for a new Walter Reed, and the timeline and complexity of the disposal process will leave the status quo in place at Walter Reed for years. The federal government will now look to see if it has any uses for the property, and if it does not, the site will be turned over to the General Services Administration (GSA). Norton is Ranking Member of the GSA subcommittee. If no government agency desires the property, the District will have an opportunity to negotiate for the site for public uses, such as parks or schools. If private uses are contemplated, the transaction will be more complicated and costly because of the requirements of the Federal Property Act, but Norton said that “there are good examples that show that this is doable.” She cited Cameron Station in Virginia, where private condominiums are now located. Norton cautioned, however, that Walter Reed is a huge building, with smaller buildings throughout the grounds, and too many questions are raised to responsibly speculate on how it could be used or converted, including environmental and historical preservation issues, and many more. Norton and her staff have begun the process of investigating these issues, but “for the foreseeable future, Walter Reed is going to stay right where it is,” Norton said.